**Neoliberalism, English, and the Market: A Discourse Analysis of Policy and Promotion in Higher Education in India**

**Abstract:**

This article explores how English is discursively constructed and commodified within the neoliberal landscape of Indian higher education. Drawing on critical discourse analysis (CDA), it examines key policy documents, promotional materials from public and private universities, and classroom experiences to reveal how English functions not only as a medium of instruction but as a symbol of prestige, employability, and global connectivity. National policies like the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 appear to support multilingualism, yet institutional practices frequently elevate English as the language of merit, branding, and internationalization. Through examples from both India and the Gulf, the article reflects on how students and faculty navigate the tensions between policy rhetoric and market realities. The discussion also highlights emergent counter-discourses—such as translanguaging pedagogies and multilingual initiatives—that challenge the monolingual logic of neoliberal education. Ultimately, the article calls for critically aware language policies that resist the commodification of English and support more equitable, pluralistic approaches to higher education in the Global South.

**Key words:** Neoliberalism, English in higher education in India, Language Policy, critical discourse analysis (CDA), linguistic commodification

**1. Introduction: Language, Market, and the Neoliberal Turn**

In today’s world, English has become more than just a language. It is often seen as a global passport which opens doors to education, jobs, and international networks. Around the world, and especially in countries like India, English is now closely linked with success. Many people see it as a skill you need to survive and grow in the modern economy. Scholars like Robert Phillipson (2018) have called this the “linguistic face of globalization,” where English becomes a powerful tool in the global marketplace. In India, English has a long and complicated history. It was brought during colonial rule. It stayed after independence, becoming a language of courts, universities, and jobs. But in recent years, a new shift has taken place. English is no longer just a language of the elite. It is being sold as a product. Coaching centres promise “global English,” universities promote “English-medium” education, and companies demand “soft skills” in English. This is part of a larger change in how education works today—what many scholars call *neoliberalism*.

Neoliberalism is a political and economic idea which supports free markets, private investment, and reduced public spending. In education, neoliberalism means treating students as customers, and universities as businesses. Education is no longer only about learning. It is about getting a “return on investment.” Knowledge becomes something to sell in which language, especially English, becomes a commodity. As Rizvi & Lingard (2009) explain, neoliberal education systems focus on things that can be measured—like rankings, placements, and English test scores. Universities compete for funding, faculty, and students and market themselves using English, hoping to attract a global audience. This trend is also strong in India. Private universities advertise their English programs. Government policies also support “internationalization,” often meaning more English use in research and teaching.

This has led to a strange situation. On one hand, policies like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 (Ministry of HRD, Govt of India, 2020) promote mother tongues and Indian languages. On the other hand, the same policy talks about creating a “global citizen,” and building links with international institutions—often through English. This creates ironical situation as students and teachers feel caught between two goals: preserving local languages, and succeeding in a market that rewards English. There are also deeper questions. Is English just a helpful tool, or is it shaping how we think about education and identity? Who benefits when English becomes the “default” language of the university? What happens to those who speak other languages? Scholars like Rubdy & Alsagoff (2013) argue that such questions are not just about language—they are about power.

This article looks at these issues more closely. It asks:

* How is English presented in Indian higher education today, especially in a market-driven system?
* What does it mean when English becomes a way to “brand” a university or sell a course?
* What contradictions appear between the promise of inclusion and the push for global competitiveness?

To answer these questions, the article studies two kinds of texts:

1. Policy documents, such as NEP 2020 and University Grants Commission (UGC)/All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) guidelines.
2. Promotional materials, like university websites and brochures.

It also includes reflections from classroom and faculty experiences, especially in Indian and Gulf universities. The article uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to study how English is framed in these texts. CDA helps us see the hidden messages and power structures in language. It also helps us understand what is said, and what is left out.

The aim of this article is not to reject English. It is to ask what happens when English becomes a product to sell, rather than a means to learn. It hopes to show that language choices are never neutral. They reflect wider values, market pressures, and ideas of success.

## ****2. Policy Texts and the Discursive Construction of English****

Educational policies are not just about rules and plans; they shape how we think about learning, knowledge, and language. In India, where there are many regional languages with hundreds of dialects, education policy has always faced a challenge: how to promote local languages while preparing students for a globalized world. This section looks at how English is framed in key Indian policy documents—especially the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020,** and documents from **UGC, AICTE, and National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)** —and what that tells us about the values that shape higher education today.

### ****2.1 The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020: A Balancing Act****

The **NEP 2020** was praised for its focus on **multilingualism** and its support for **mother tongue-based education**. In school education, it strongly recommends that children be taught in their **home language or regional language** at least until Grade 5, ideally till Grade 8. It also encourages the **promotion of Indian classical languages**, tribal languages, and Sanskrit. At the same time, the NEP emphasizes that students must become “**proficient in the English language**”to engage with “**global knowledge and communication systems**” (NEP, 2020, p. 14) English is described as a **“link to the world**,” necessary for global mobility, research, and access to international resources. In this framing, Indian languages are cultural and emotional, while English is practical and strategic.

This division is not accidental. It reflects an ideology where Indian languages are seen as markers of identity and heritage, and English as the language of mobility and merit. In terms of **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)—**an approach that explores how language both reflects and reproduces power relations—this framing constructs English as a neutral tool of progress, while Indian languages are symbolically tied to tradition and the past. Taking into consideration the work of **Norman** Fairclough (2013)**,** who views discourse as a form of social practice embedded in broader systems of inequality, this positioning of English reinforces neoliberal values such as merit, competition, and global mobility. Van Dijk (1993) adds that discourse plays a crucial role in shaping ideologies through control over knowledge and access to communicative events. In this context it privileges fluent English speakers in academic and professional domains. Similarly, Wodak & Meyer's (2001)discourse-historical approach emphasizes how historical and institutional contexts influence how languages are valued or marginalized. Seen through this lens, the elevation of English in Indian higher education is not just about utility—it is a discursive strategy that aligns with market-oriented, globalizing ideologies, often at the expense of linguistic diversity and equity.

The NEP does not openly question this hierarchy; instead, it seeks to “balance” both needs—without explaining how institutions should manage this balance in real, multilingual classrooms and campuses. Moreover, the NEP remains **silent on hybrid or localized forms of English**, such as Indian English, Hinglish, or regional varieties. It imagines “English” as a global standard, rather than a diverse and situated practice. This raises the question: Whose English is being promoted? And who gets left behind in this standardization?

### ****2.2 UGC, AICTE, and NAAC: Internationalization and the English Medium****

Beyond the NEP, policy influence is also visible in the operational guidelines of **regulatory and accrediting bodies** like the **University Grants Commission (UGC),** the **All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)**, and the **National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)**. There documents shape how universities run programs, train faculty, and report performance. In recent years, both the UGC and the NAAC have actively promoted the “internationalization” of Indian higher education. This push is reflected in several strategic initiatives, including the signing of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with foreign universities, efforts to increase the number of international students on Indian campuses, encouraging publication in international (often English-language) journals, hosting foreign faculty members, and offering a growing number of courses exclusively in the English medium. NAAC’s Revised Accreditation Framework (RAF) (2023) even includes **“use of English for academic and administrative purposes”** as a **quality benchmark** under global outreach. English proficiency is implicitly tied to **institutional prestige and rankings**. Institutions with strong English usage are seen as more competitive and modern.

In many AICTE-funded programs (especially for engineering or management), **English language training** is part of employability development. The **National Employability Enhancement Mission (NEEM)** and other skill-based programs often include modules on spoken English, soft skills, and business communication. Such policy directions build a hidden narrative: if your institution wants to rise in the ranks, **English is non-negotiable**. As with the NEP, these documents do not overtly dismiss Indian languages—but they rarely promote their use beyond formal slogans. English, meanwhile, becomes the **language of governance, publication, and mobility.**

While these discourses are often associated with private universities, public institutions are not exempt from similar language ideologies. Flagship institutions such as the Indian Institute of Technology (IITs), Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISERs), and National Institute of Technology (NITs) increasingly adopt promotional language centered on global rankings, English-medium MOOCs (e.g., NPTEL), and international publication output. The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), for instance, uses parameters like “perception” and “research output” that implicitly prioritize English-language dissemination. Thus, English becomes a measure not only of individual student competence but of institutional legitimacy itself—even in spaces historically associated with national prestige and public access.

### ****2.3 CDA Insights: Constructing English as Global, Indian Languages as Cultural****

From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, these policies are doing more than guiding education. They are **constructing a worldview** where English is not just a language—it is a marker of development, modernity, and success. This fits into what Fairclough (2007) called the “marketization of discourse,” where language is shaped by capitalist values like competition, branding, and performance.

A close reading of policy texts reveals a pattern of recurring phrases that reinforce a particular vision of language and education under neoliberal logic. Terms such as **“global competencies,” “21st-century skills,” “employability enhancement,” “English as link language,”** and **“international benchmarking”** appear frequently across documents like the NEP 2020 and UGC guidelines. These phrases are not merely descriptive—they are ideologically loaded. They construct English as the gateway to global relevance and upward mobility, while implicitly framing Indian languages as lacking in economic value. In CDA terms, such discourse positions English as the natural medium of progress, technology, and professionalism, while relegating regional languages to the domains of culture, heritage, and identity. This linguistic hierarchy is not always explicit, but it is embedded in the logics of internationalization and market-readiness that dominate current higher education policy. The repetition of these terms across multiple policy sites contributes to what Fairclough (2013) calls “common sense” discourse—ideologies that are naturalized through repetition and institutional backing.

These phrases are rarely explained. They carry **assumptions** about what is good and desirable. English is imagined as a **universal currency**, while Indian languages are attached to emotion, tradition, and sometimes even inefficiency. What is missing here is any serious **recognition of linguistic diversity in higher education**. The documents do not talk about:

* The use of **Indian English varieties** in classrooms or writing,
* The multilingual realities of Indian campuses,
* Or the **linguistic anxieties** of students from rural or non-English-medium backgrounds.

As Ramanathan (2013) notes, policy silences are also a kind of discourse. What remains unspoken is just as important as what is said. In this case, the **silence around hybrid and regional Englishes** shows a desire for standardization. But this standard often reflects a **middle-class, urban, elite orientation**, leaving many students feeling insecure or excluded.

### ****2.4 Who Is Excluded?****

The impact of these language policies is not felt equally. Students from English-medium private schools may find the system welcoming. But many students from rural areas, state board backgrounds, or tribal communities face a **hidden penalty**. They must first “catch up” in English to access even basic academic resources.

The use of English in teaching, testing, and placements becomes a **silent filter**—not formally stated in the policy, but widely practiced in institutions. This reinforces existing inequalities in access to quality education and jobs. Moreover, faculty from regional universities or those trained in Indian languages may find it harder to publish in high-impact English-language journals. Their work is undervalued not for its content, but for its **linguistic currency**.

In short, the current policy environment in India supports a **dual message**. It promotes **multilingualism on paper**, but **rewards English in practice**. English is constructed as a neutral, global tool—but this hides the fact that it operates as a powerful gatekeeper.

### 3. Promotional Discourses: The Marketable English Campus

In today’s competitive education market, universities are no longer just places of learning—they are brands. And English plays a major role in this branding. A quick scan of university websites, brochures, and social media pages shows how often phrases like **“world-class education,” “global campus,” “accent training,”** and **“English-only instruction”** are used. These words are not neutral. They are part of a promotional language that sells English as a product, a promise, and a lifestyle.

Private and semi-private universities such as Symbiosis International University, **Ashoka University, O.P. Jindal Global University, Amity University, Shiv Nadar University, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, and SRM University** often lead this trend. Their marketing material frames English as more than a medium of instruction. It becomes a symbol of quality, confidence, and international mobility. Many of these institutions promise “soft skill training” or “global English proficiency” as part of the campus experience. Some even offer **accent training** to help students sound “neutral” or “global,” appealing to both domestic aspirations and international job markets.

A similar branding ethos is visible, albeit less overtly, in premier public institutions. The Indian Institutes of Technology and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, for example, routinely highlight their English-only instructional models, international collaborations, and faculty trained abroad. Institutional websites and annual reports often feature phrases like “global innovation hub,” “English-medium research ecosystem,” and “international centres of excellence,” reinforcing a perception of English as integral to world-class status. While the profit motive may differ from private entities, the semiotic framing of English remains deeply tied to upward mobility and global visibility.

This shows how **English has been commodified**—turned into a product that can be sold and consumed. The idea is not just to teach English, but to package it with cultural attitudes, clothing styles, public speaking skills, and even personality development. In this way, English becomes a complete identity. As Heller (2010)explains, under neoliberalism, language is no longer just a tool for communication—it becomes a skill to be bought, measured, and displayed. This is especially true in the Indian middle-class context, where English is seen as a marker of class, success, and cosmopolitanism.

These promotional discourses create certain pressures on universities. To live up to their “global” image, many institutions shift their **curriculum design** to include more English-medium courses and international references. There is often a preference for **faculties who are fluent in English** and have international degrees or accents. This can lead to exclusions—qualified faculty who are more comfortable in Indian languages may find them side-lined. Similarly, **students from rural or regional-language backgrounds** may feel out of place, even if they are academically capable. This focus on “marketable English” creates symbolic boundaries around who belongs and who does not. Students from regional-language backgrounds may feel excluded, not because of academic incapacity, but because of the perceived inadequacy of their English. Faculty who lack international exposure or “polished” accents may be overlooked despite expertise. As Piller (2016) argues, language policies and practices often act as covert mechanisms of social inequality. They determine access to resources, participation, and even belonging in educational spaces. In this sense, the commodification of English reinforces class divides and undermines the goals of inclusive education.

Moreover, the push for English branding affects how students see themselves. Many students begin to measure their confidence, intelligence, and worth based on their ability to speak English fluently. This can cause **linguistic insecurity** and **class anxiety**, particularly for first-generation learners. As Pennycook (2006) points out, English is not just a language—it is tied to power and identity. Students who don’t “fit” the English-speaking model may feel they do not belong in these elite spaces. This leads to important questions: Who is the ideal student in these advertisements? What kind of faculty is being imagined? And whose voices are left out?

#### Table1: Promotional Keywords and Institutional Positioning in Private Universities

| **University** | **Promotional Phrases Used** | **English-related Offerings** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Ashoka University | Liberal arts, global standards | English-medium seminars, writing centre support |
| O.P. Jindal | Global university” international faculty | English proficiency workshops, accent training |
| Amity University | Smart campus, spoken English classes | English labs, spoken English clubs |
| Shiv Nadar University | Research-driven, English-only environment | All courses in English, personality development |
| Manipal University | Global exposure, professional communication | English certification, soft skill modules |
| SRM University | World-class, global recruiters | Campus English policies, IELTS/TOEFL training |

Sources: Institutional websites and brochures (2023–2024)

### *****Table 2: English-Medium Branding in Select Indian Public Institutions*****

| **Institution** | **Taglines / Website Phrases** | **Language Policy Features** | **Global Positioning Cues** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **IIT Mumbai** | A Global Leader in Engineering Education and Research | English as sole medium of instruction; English-medium entrance exams | International MoUs, QS/Times rankings prominently displayed |
| **AIIMS New Delhi** | Serving Humanity through Knowledge | English-only curriculum and official communication | Focus on global medical protocols and publishing in top-tier international journals |
| **IISc Bangalore** | Excellence in Science & Engineering Research | All academic programs in English; emphasis on technical writing | Partnerships with foreign universities; international PhDs encouraged |
| **IISER Pune** | Where Curiosity Leads to Discovery | Curriculum delivered in English; student writing centres for scientific English | Participation in EU Horizon projects, Erasmus+ |
| **NIT Trichy** | Global Knowledge, Indian Values | English-medium education; official communications in English | Highlighting of alumni in multinational corporations and global research forums |
| **ISRO (affiliated research bodies)** | Harnessing Space Technology for National Development | English used in research dissemination and technical training | Collaborations with NASA, ESA; technical documents in English only |

## This following comparative table reveals that while private universities market English as a key part of an aspirational, global identity, public institutions tend to frame English as a functional tool for academic and professional excellence. However, both sectors participate in a shared ideology that links English to merit, mobility, and global legitimacy. In private settings, English is commodified—part of the campus experience and institutional brand. In public universities and research institutions, the use of English is normalized, rarely questioned, and often invisible in policy but dominant in practice. This distinction is not trivial: it shapes how students encounter and internalize linguistic hierarchies. Both models contribute to an unequal linguistic economy where proficiency in specific, standardized English becomes a gatekeeper to opportunity.

## *Table 3: Comparative Table: Language Framing in Private vs. Public Indian Universities*

| **Category** | **Private Universities** | **Public Institutions** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Language of Instruction** | English-only (explicitly marketed) | English-only (implicitly assumed) |
| **Branding Keywords** | Global campus, International faculty, Accent training, World-class education | Centre of excellence, Global leader in research, Serving national/global needs |
| **Promotional Focus** | Lifestyle branding, English as aspirational identity | Scientific output, global benchmarks, English as default academic language |
| **Language Policy Visibility** | Clearly stated in brochures, websites | Often implicit or embedded in curriculum documents |
| **Institutional Partnerships** | Foreign universities, EdTech firms, industry-sponsored English labs | International research collaborations (MoUs, research consortia) |
| **Linguistic Support Structures** | Language labs, soft skills training, accent reduction | Research writing workshops, technical communication centres |
| **Cultural Framing of English** | English as upward mobility, global lifestyle | English as neutral tool of science, professional requirement |

### ****4. Reflections from the Field: Pedagogy in a Neoliberal Language Economy****

One of the clearest windows into the neoliberal language economy is the classroom itself. Here, in the everyday exchanges between teachers and students, one can observe how language becomes more than a medium of communication—it becomes a currency, a performance, and at times, a source of anxiety. My own experience as a teacher in India and the Gulf over the past decade has revealed how deeply English is tied to questions of identity, aspiration, and belonging.

In Indian classrooms today, language is not just a medium of instruction—it is a site of negotiation. Students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, speaking Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and more. Yet, in many professional and higher education settings, English is the primary language of teaching, testing, and aspiration. This creates a quiet but powerful conflict. On one hand, English opens doors to jobs and global recognition. On the other, it risks silencing the richness of students’ home languages and the cultural knowledge they carry. The choice to use English is often not a choice at all—it is shaped by institutional demands, societal expectations, and market forces.

I recall a group presentation at a liberal arts college in Maharashtra, where a student began his talk in Hindi to explain a key concept, then quickly apologized and switched to English. “Sorry, I forgot,” he said, “we’re supposed to speak in English only.” No one had interrupted him—there was no visible policing—but the pressure was internalized. Later, in a one-on-one discussion, he shared that he could explain things more clearly in Hindi but felt it would be seen as “unprofessional.” Another student from Tamil Nadu mentioned that while she thought in Tamil, she deliberately avoided using Tamil phrases in her essays for fear they would be seen as too “local.” These small moments, repeated across classrooms, show how language hierarchies operate not through formal bans, but through subtle signals about what counts as “good” academic or professional language.

These anxieties are not limited to private educational spaces. In my engagements with students in public universities, a similar concern with “sounding academic” and aligning with native-speaker norms persists. Many express unease about preparing for TOEFL, GRE, or publishing in Scopus-indexed journals—requirements that are rarely offered in Indian languages (Pattanayak, 1990). Despite institutional rhetoric celebrating multilingual heritage, rewards—be they scholarships, global internships, or research fellowships—are often tethered to proficiency in a narrowly defined, standardized form of English. Here too, language becomes a filter for opportunity, not a bridge.

This pressure to “perform” a particular kind of global English reflects what Fairclough (2013) calls the marketisation of discourse—where language is not just a tool for knowledge, but a product to be packaged and sold. Students in both India and the Gulf are acutely aware that English is no longer just a subject in the classroom—it is a survival skill. It is required for passing IELTS and TOEFL exams, for clearing job interviews, and increasingly, for being heard and taken seriously in academic spaces.

At the institutional level, these pressures translate into expectations for both students and faculty. In India, for instance, teachers are often encouraged to adopt a neutral accent, design syllabi in English-medium only, and integrate “global English communication” into their teaching styles. In one university where I was invited for a training workshop, administrators spoke openly about the need to “market” their English courses to attract international students. The branding of English was not just about language proficiency—it was about projecting a lifestyle, a modern identity aligned with global business cultures.

These experiences are echoed in applied linguistics research, where scholars like Gray (2010) and Block et al. (2013) critique how neoliberalism shapes classroom practices. English is no longer seen as a neutral skill but as symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1993), something that gives students access to elite networks and opportunities—if they can master its correct form and tone. And yet, there are contradictions that become evident in practice. Policy documents like the NEP 2020 in India speak glowingly of multilingualism, mother tongues, and inclusive pedagogy. But in reality, students who express themselves in regional languages are often sidelined in the name of employability. English, framed as the “global link language,” ends up becoming the gatekeeper of success.

This contradiction is not accidental. As Ruth Wodak (2009) notes, education policies often send mixed messages. They affirm local identities at the symbolic level, while privileging global norms in actual implementation. In the classroom, these tensions surface as students try to reconcile who they are with who they are expected to be. The emotional cost of this is often underestimated. When English becomes a requirement for economic survival, it also becomes a site of loss. Students may begin to suppress their cultural expressions, their mother tongue idioms, and even their accents to fit into what they perceive as the “marketable” mold. In this process, their voices are not just translated—they are transformed.

As Ingrid Piller (2016) points out, language is never neutral. Language policies and teaching practices, however well-intentioned, can become instruments of exclusion if they fail to acknowledge the social hierarchies they reinforce. In classrooms where students feel compelled to mimic a specific version of English to be heard or accepted, diversity is not celebrated—it is flattened. In one particularly telling moment, a student from Kerala once said to me: “We’re taught to respect all languages, but in the end, it’s only English that matters for marks, jobs, everything.” His words summarize the lived contradictions of language education in the neoliberal university: policy promotes multilingualism, but the marketplace rewards English fluency alone.

As a teacher, I often find myself in a conflicted role. I want to empower students through English, but I also want to validate the linguistic richness they bring with them. Balancing these aims is one of the most complex and urgent challenges of pedagogy today.

### ****5. Resistance, Rupture, and Reimagining Language Futures****

Even in a higher education system dominated by English, there are spaces of resistance and imagination. Across India and the global South, educators, scholars, and students are asking a different set of questions: What if English didn’t always have to be the language of success? What if students could learn and express themselves in more than one language—without fear of being judged? This section explores the small but significant ways in which dominant language ideologies are being challenged. These include new classroom practices, changes in curriculum, and grassroots movements that reimagine language not just as a skill, but as part of one’s identity and community.

### ****5.1 Translanguaging as Pedagogical Resistance****

One of the most powerful responses to English dominance is the idea of **translanguaging.** Coined by Welsh educators and popularized by scholars like **Ofelia García** and **Suresh Canagarajah**, translanguaging refers to the way multilingual speakers naturally move between languages to make meaning. Rather than treating languages as separate and fixed, this approach values the fluid and hybrid ways people actually communicate in real life (García & Wei, 2014). In Indian classrooms, this can be seen when a teacher explains a scientific concept in English, then uses Hindi or Tamil for examples, information or clarifications, or when students write essays mixing English with local expressions to better convey their ideas. While traditional schooling often treats this as “code-switching” or error, translanguaging sees it as a strength—a sign of linguistic flexibility and creativity.

Canagarajah (2012) argues that translanguaging is a way of resisting linguistic imperialism. In his study of South Asian students writing in academic English, he found that many of them used local storytelling forms, idioms, and logic to shape their arguments—even while meeting university expectations. This “voice negotiation” is a subtle but powerful form of linguistic agency.

### ****5.2 Indigenous Knowledge and Multilingual Futures****

In parallel, movements for **indigenous knowledge systems** are also reshaping language in education. These movements argue that knowledge is not neutral or universal—it is always shaped by language, culture, and history. When we teach only in English, we often ignore or devalue the rich ways of knowing embedded in Indian languages. For instance, the **People’s Linguistic Survey of India** (PLSI), led by G. N. Devy, has documented hundreds of Indian languages that are spoken but not taught in schools or used in universities. These are not just “dialects”—they carry philosophical traditions, ecological knowledge, and oral histories. Scholars like Kumaravadivelu (2016)have emphasized the importance of decolonizing language education by reconnecting to these local epistemologies.

Some universities are now trying to incorporate indigenous or regional languages into coursework—not just in language departments, but across disciplines. For example, certain institutions in Kerala and the Northeast offer optional modules in tribal languages, and some social science courses are offered bilingually.

### ****5.3 Multilingual Curriculum Experiments****

There are also interesting experiments in creating **multilingual higher education curricula.** Some private and public universities in India now encourage students to submit assignments in English or their home language (with translation support). A few liberal arts colleges have started bridge courses where foundational concepts are introduced in regional languages before switching to English. While these models are not yet widespread, they challenge the assumption that academic excellence is tied to English fluency. They also help reduce student anxiety, especially for first-generation learners who may feel left out in fully English-medium classrooms.

The **NEP 2020** has made space for multilingual instruction, especially at the primary level. While implementation in higher education is still limited, the policy signals a shift in discourse—from language as a gatekeeper to language as a resource. The challenge is to ensure this does not remain a token gesture but becomes part of structural change.

### ****5.4 Rethinking Language and Value****

All these practices—translanguaging, indigenous language inclusion, and multilingual pedagogy—point toward a **new model of language education**. In this model, **linguistic pluralism** is not treated as a problem to be fixed, but as a resource to be cultivated. Importantly, this model refuses the idea that English is the only path to success. This does not mean abandoning English. English remains an important part of global exchange. But it means resisting the **commodification of English**, where language becomes a product to be bought, sold, and measured. As Piller, (2016) notes, in the neoliberal university, English is often marketed as part of a “global lifestyle” rather than a means of communication. When students are forced to perform English fluency as a symbol of worth, we risk turning education into a branding exercise.

These alternate practices—though still marginal—offer hope. They remind us that language is not just about skills or scores. It is about identity, community, and justice. If Indian higher education is to become truly inclusive, it must value all languages—not just English—and all ways of speaking, not just those that “sell well” in the market.

### ****6. Conclusion: Whose English, Whose Market?****

This article has explored how English functions not just as a language of communication, but as a **symbol of value**, a **ticket to mobility**, and a **marker of institutional prestige** in the Indian higher education system. Through critical discourse analysis of policies, promotional materials, and classroom practices, we have seen how English is increasingly entangled with neoliberal priorities—**branding, marketability, employability, and global visibility.**

At the policy level, the **NEP 2020** gestures toward multilingualism, yet much of its implementation remains biased toward English as the language of global connection and aspiration. Regulatory bodies like the **UGC** and **NAAC** push for international rankings, foreign collaborations, and research outputs—many of which are implicitly linked to English-medium communication. Meanwhile, institutional marketing promotes an “English-only” campus as a mark of elite status, reinforcing linguistic hierarchies. In classrooms—especially in private or internationalized campuses—language often becomes a site of anxiety and self-surveillance. Students internalize the belief that only a certain kind of English—usually Western-accented and grammatically “polished”—is valid or valuable. Teachers are pressured to package their pedagogy in globally recognizable (i.e., English-heavy) forms, even when students' actual learning needs are more multilingual and locally grounded.

At the heart of these tensions lies a crucial question: **Should English be treated as a neutral tool or as a value-laden product?** When language becomes a commodity, students become consumers. Their identities, voices, and knowledge are filtered through a narrow standard of fluency and correctness. This is not just a pedagogical concern—it is an ethical and political one. But this need not be the only path forward. As the previous section showed, there are ongoing efforts—though still marginal—to **reimagine language education**. Translanguaging classrooms, indigenous language programs, and experiments with bilingual curricula point to alternative futures. These are futures where **linguistic pluralism is not a barrier but a foundation**, and where education does not demand the erasure of one’s voice for the sake of global visibility.

What is needed now is a **shift in language policy and practice**—one that is critically aware of how English functions in the market, but also refuses to reduce students to linguistic consumers. Institutions must support faculty and students in navigating multilingual realities without shame or penalty. Accreditation bodies should recognize linguistic diversity as an asset, not a liability. And curriculum designers must ask: Whose English are we promoting, and at what cost?

In the end, the question is: **Who decides what kind of English counts, and who benefits from that decision?**

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